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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2087  
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE  
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE  
RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE  
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 4653  
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 2901  
RHMFSS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHDC  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASHGABAT 000033

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/IR, SCA/CEN AND INL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/08/2019

TAGS: PREL PGOV SNAR IR TX

SUBJECT: IRAN/TURKMENISTAN: BACKGROUND ON TEHERAN MOU --  
IT'S ABOUT STOPPING DRUGS

Classified By: Charge Richard Miles, per reasons 1.4(B) and (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: A Turkish diplomat told Embassy Ashgabat's Iran Watcher on January 8 that recent announcements of expanded cooperation between Iran and Turkmenistan are more about the need to address the flow of Afghan opiates from Iran into Turkmenistan than anything else. Hakan Chengiz, the Turkish DCM, said that the MOU signed in Teheran last month between the two countries has little to do with Turkmen-Iranian "ties," but rather indicates an acknowledgement that security along Iran's longest land border must improve if Turkmenistan is to have any success in stemming the flow of narcotics into its territory. END SUMMARY.

TURKMEN "GETTING SERIOUS" ABOUT STOPPING DRUG FLOW FROM IRAN

¶2. (C) The Iranian press reported in late December that Turkmenistan and Iran had signed an MOU comprised of 17 articles in the areas of "border security, customs and consular affairs" prior to the regional Economic Cooperation Organization (ECC) ministerial meeting in Teheran in late December. According to Chengiz, the Turkmen are "getting serious" with Iran about clamping down on drug traffickers headed across the border to Turkmenistan and beyond. The consular aspect of the MOU, he said, reflects the need to address how to handle the cases of Iranian citizens arrested entering Turkmenistan with drugs. He said that this has particularly become a problem as Iranian truck drivers are being apprehended in Turkmenistan carrying small quantities of opiates. There have been problems, he said, with poor physical and judicial treatment of the accused in these cases, all of which would be addressed in the MOU.

TRUCKERS INVOLVED IN DRUG TRAFFICKING

¶3. (C) Chengiz said that he has first-hand experience with such cases because in addition to Iranians, Turkish truck drivers coming from Iran have also been arrested in Turkmenistan and charged with transporting narcotics. He said that he and other diplomats from the Turkish Embassy had attended their court proceedings, and several are still in jail. In general, he said, Turkmenistan treats truck drivers poorly, whether Turkish or Iranian. (NOTE: 40,000 Iranian trucks pass yearly through the four crossing points on the border separating Iran and Turkmenistan. Truck drivers have complained for years about the poor facilities available to them and say that traffic police demand bribes and react

violently if a driver refuses to pay. Following a large protest by Iranian truck drivers in Ashgabat in February 2008, one demonstrator detained by the police died after reportedly being beaten while in custody. END NOTE)

¶4. (C) COMMENT: The announcement of the MOU between Iran and Turkmenistan comes at a time when the Iranian press continues to tout the continued expansion of cultural ties between the two countries, including the Iranian Cultural Center's translation of dozens of Iranian books into Turkmen. On the surface, the new agreement is at least a start towards improving a very problematic situation along the border that separates Turkmenistan and Iran. END COMMENT.

MILES